

## Report of Campaign Against Major General Sterling Price, in October and November, 1864 (pt. 5)

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REPORT OF CAMPAIGN AGAINST MAJOR GENERAL STERLING  
PRICE, IN OCTOBER AND NOVEMBER, 1864.

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(Continued from page 506.)

"BEING convinced of their intention to avoid a fight if possible, I determined to attack them at once.

"The 1st and 4th brigades were with me in the advance. I had directed the 2nd brigade to halt early in the day to procure forage for their horses to enable me to put them in the advance to press the pursuit at night; consequently I did not rely upon them to participate in the early part of the engagement.

"I had supposed that General McNeil's brigade of General Pleasanton's division was close up in my rear, and sent back to hurry it forward; while the 1st and 4th brigades of the 1st division were quickly deployed in line, and, under the cover of the fire of the 1st Colorado battery (McLain's) posted upon the bluffs, swept across the plain at a gallop until within musket range of the enemy's line. Skirmishers were rapidly deployed, and but a few moments elapsed until the engagement became general.

"I now ordered forward the 1st Colorado battery, which, with a section of howitzers attached to the 15th Kansas cavalry and under command of Sergeant Patterson of the 14th Kansas cavalry, poured a destructive fire into the enemy's ranks. It soon became evident that I was engaging all the available force of Price's army, which outnumbered me more than eight to one. Their superiority of numbers enabling them to press upon my flanks with a large force, compelled me to fall back about five hundred yards from my first line, which was done in good order, and the line re-formed in the face of a terrific fire. The enemy pressed forward their centre, but were promptly checked by the canister from the first

Colorado battery. It was now near sun-down, and my command had been engaged nearly two hours and their ammunition was nearly exhausted, while a large force of the enemy was passing under cover of a corn field around my left flank, and my force being too small to extend my line in that direction, I was about to direct my line to fall back and take position on the bluff, when very unexpectedly the brigade of General Sanborn, of General Pleasanton's command came up. I immediately placed them in position on my left, directing General Sanborn to dismount his men and advance through the corn field, which was promptly executed, repulsing the flanking column of the enemy, who now abandoned the field and retreated rapidly under cover of the night in the direction of Pineville, leaving their dead and wounded in our hands."

The General especially names Col. Ford, Lieut. Col. Hoyt, Major Ketner, of 16th Kansas, Captain W. D. McLain, of the Colorado battery, Lieut. J. B. Pond, 3rd Wisconsin cavalry, and Sergeant George Patterson, of the 14th Kansas, who deserve the high commendations he bestows upon them.

General Sanborn's report was made to General Pleasanton and published some time ago. It does not materially differ from the foregoing, and hardly does himself justice for gallantry on this occasion.

Lieut. Col. Hoyt commanded the 1st brigade, Kansas and Wisconsin troops who, behaved as usual, in the most gallant manner. Col. Ford commanded the 2nd brigade and reports concerning the battle as follows:—

"From this time (after leaving Fort Scott on the morning of the 26th) until the afternoon of the 28th we continued marching night and day, with but short halts and small feeds, following at all times the trail of the enemy. About 10 o'clock A. M., my brigade being in advance, we discovered the enemy's rear in the edge of the woods north of Shoal Creek. I sent two companies of the 16th Kansas cavalry into the woods as skirmishers, who soon reported that the party was about 200 strong, and retreating fast. I then pressed rapidly forward, and upon reaching Granby ascertained that they had just passed

through and that Price's whole army was doubtless at Newtonia, distance five miles. The advance soon reported that the enemy's train was in sight and but few men visible. I hurried forward at a gallop, and when within two miles of the town saw the rear of the rebel train entering the woods beyond town on the Cassville road. The battery was immediately planted on the bluffs and commenced throwing shell, while the 16th Kansas cavalry and 2nd Colorado cavalry were formed into two lines and ordered to charge down towards the enemy's train, the charge being led by the Major General commanding the 1st division, in person. We advanced at a rapid gallop with skirmishes in front until we came upon the main body of the enemy, who was formed three lines deep and the front line dismounted. The action was commenced in earnest, and for three hours with less than nine hundred men (my brigade consisting of less than six hundred), we contended with the enemy of ten times our number and closed the day by driving him from the field, leaving his dead and wounded in our hands. During the hottest of the engagement the enemy threw a large body of men upon our left, their fire telling fearfully upon our small force; but the left, commanded by Major Ketner (commanding 16th Kansas cavalry) never moved or flinched, but answered shot for shot. The brigade remained on the field until nine o'clock P. M., when it went into camp in the town of Newtonia."

"Major C. S. Charlot, my Ass't Adj't General, asked leave to keep with the advance on the 28th, and he thus briefly reports his observations and gallant participation in the battle:"—

"We crossed Spring River and reached Carthage, Mo. before daylight on the 28th, and halted the command for rest and feed three hours, when the column was again in motion. Riding forward, I reached the front at 11:30 at Diamond Grove, where the enemy, with their train was in plain sight. General Blunt came up immediately and ordered an advance. We had overtaken Major McKenny, bearer of a flag of truce, but the flag was ordered back, and Major McKenny, taking

his escort, advanced against the enemy as skirmishers. Col. Ford's brigade, Major Ketner of 16th Kansas cavalry, in the advance, went forward and messengers were sent to the rear by General Blunt to hurry forward the whole command. The enemy retreated rapidly out of sight, but at Newtonia the advance under Col. Ford came upon them again. General Blunt came up immediately (about 3 o'clock) and ordered a charge which was made by the 2nd Colorado and 16th Kansas, the General leading in person; McLain's battery opening on the enemy at the same time, supported by the 15th Kansas under Lieut. Col. Hoyt. This deployed their whole line, which now threatened to turn both our right and left flanks. Orders were sent back to McNeil, who was supposed to be in our immediate rear, and to Moonlight who had not yet come up, but both these commands had been halted to feed, and did not reach the ground in time to take part in the action. With the 2nd Colorado, 15th and 16th Kansas, all together less than 1000 men, we fought the whole of Shelby's division, and had succeeded in driving them in the centre of their line when General Sanborn unexpectedly arrived, and rapidly forming on the left, charged the enemy's right, and our victory was complete. Night coming on pursuit was impossible and the command returned to Newtonia, where the remainder of our column had already arrived and gone into camp."

#### Unfortunate Orders and Consequent Delay.

"Closing the day at Newtonia, the 28th October, with a complete repulse of the enemy, I gave orders for a renewal of the pursuit at three o'clock next morning. Price being hard pressed had paroled the prisoners whom I had sought to secure by Major McKenny's dispatches, and they, with the slightly wounded were sent back to the rear. I sent you the following dispatch:—

“NEWTONIA, Mo., October 28th, 8 o'clock P. M., 1864.

*Major General Halleck, Chief of Staff:—*

“We came up to the enemy at this place this evening and General Blunt in advance immediately engaged him. General Sanborn with his command soon joined the advance, and the rebels were again routed with heavy loss. They now run towards Cassville, where I shall continue after three hours rest.

“S. R. CURTIS, *Major General.*”

Everything now promised a complete success in view of our proximity to the enemy, his exhausted condition, and his disastrous defeat. He was still in a fruitful section of Missouri, but by pressing him another day or two he would have no time to collect supplies, and would reach the devastated, destitute region of Arkansas without provisions, and must surrender or starve. Meantime I had arranged for light rations to follow me from Fort Scott by night and day, fast drives, in wagons half loaded. The capture of Price's army in the Ozark or Boston mountains, which were between us and the Arkansas river, seemed to me inevitable. But as the troops were commencing the march on the morning of the 29th October, General McNeil in advance, I received the following dispatch:—

“FORT SCOTT, October 27th, 1864.

“*Major General Curtis, Commanding Dep't of Kansas:—*

“GENERAL:—Major General Rosecrans has just telegraphed me instructions from Warrensburg to send Generals Sanborn and McNeil to their respective districts at Springfield and Rolla, and to conduct the remaining brigades with the captured prisoners and property of this command to Warrensburg. I shall therefore start to-morrow morning to execute these orders.

“Very respectfully your ob't servant,

“A. PLEASANTON, *Major General.*”

Generals Sanborn and McNeil received corresponding orders by the same messenger, and immediately prepared to carry them out, leaving only the shattered remainder of General Blunt's division, less than a thousand strong, for me to dispose of. I was astonished and sorely disappointed. These orders evidently grew out of a misunderstanding of my ability to overtake the enemy, as I had done at Newtonia. I have since seen a telegraphic communication dated on the 26th or 27th October, sent by General Pleasanton from Fort Scott to General Resecrans, representing our successes on the 25th as a complete destruction of Price's forces, and holding out the idea that pursuit beyond Fort Scott was needless. Whether before or after the date of General Pleasanton's assurance to me of hearty co-operation, these orders were in conflict with my hopes and expectations, arising from his letter to me of the 27th, and very unfortunate in view of the further pursuit ordered this very day (October 28th, but not yet received) by the Lieut. General. But there seemed no remedy in my reach. At Newtonia I was sixty or eighty miles from telegraphic communications, and could not get explanations to General Rosecrans in time to arrest the retiring of his forces, which General Sanborn informed me he would immediately commence. I telegraphed you some of my ill humor as follows:—

“NEWTONIA, October 29th, 1864.

“*Major General Halleck, Chief of Staff*:—

“After our victory last night, I started the troops at 3 o'clock this A. M. in further pursuit of Price, General McNeil in advance, when orders from General Rosecrans through General Pleasanton were received, taking General McNeil to Rolla and General Sanborn to Springfield, and otherwise disposing of all of their troops, including my prisoners, who have remained in the rear. I am left with only the fragment of my own regular volunteers, not exceeding one thousand, fit for duty, and deeming it improper to continue a pursuit in another department, suspended by its proper commander, I shall return by slow marches to my own department command.

“S. R. CURTIS, *Major General*.”

“NEOSHO, October 29th and 30th, 1864.

“Having telegraphed you at Newtonia, and provided as well as I could for the wounded Union and rebel soldiers that could not be brought away, I moved with my little remaining force to Neosho, a homeward movement of twelve miles. Believing our campaign concluded, we sought and secured comfortable lodgings and food, which we all much needed; but at midnight I was much and agreeably surprised by a messenger bringing your dispatches of the 28th, the most important of which was as follows:—

✓ “WASHINGTON, October 28th, 1864.

“*Major General Curtis* :—

“Lieutenant General Grant desires that Price be pursued to the Arkansas river, or at least until he encounters General Steele or General Reynolds.

“H. W. HALLECK, *Chief of Staff*.”

This dispatch clearly overruled General Rosecrans's order of the 27th, received by me at Newtonia twenty-two hours before, and justified my immediate exertions to re-call the troops of General Rosecrans to the pursuit. Calling up my officers I immediately directed orders, such as the following, to be sent instanter by couriers to each of the retiring brigades.

“HEAD-QUARTERS ARMY OF THE BORDER, }  
“In the field, Neosho, Oct. 30, 1864. }

“Dispatches just received from Lieut. General Grant require me to continue the pursuit of Price to the Arkansas river.

“You will therefore proceed, forthwith, to Cassville, by the nearest and best route, reporting to me at that place.

“This countermands all orders received by you from Generals Rosecrans and Pleasanton, concerning a retrograde movement.

“Very respectfully your obedient servant,

“S. R. CURTIS, *Major General*.”

These were sent to Brig. General Sanborn, Brig. General McNeil, Colonel Phillips, Lieut. Colonel Benteen.



I also telegraphed General Rosecrans, as follows:—

“HEAD-QUARTERS ARMY OF THE BORDER, }  
“In the field, Neosho, Oct. 30, 1 A. M., 1864. }

“*Major General Rosecrans*:—

“An order just received from Lieut. General Grant, directing the pursuit of Price to be continued to the Arkansas river, seems to conflict with your order directing the troops of General Pleasanton to their several districts, I have therefore, ordered your troops to resume the pursuit, supposing it will meet with your approbation as there are no other troops sufficient to carry out the purpose of the Lieut. General commanding.

“Since my militia have left me your portion of the command has been much the greatest, and I have expected your arrival to assume the responsibilities of the movement against Price.

“S. R. CURTIS, *Major General*.”

I also telegraphed you, as follows:—

“HEAD-QUARTERS ARMY OF THE BORDER, }  
“NEOSHO, Missouri, 1 o'clock A. M., Oct. 30, 1864. }

“*Major Gen. Hallock, Chief of Staff, Washington, D. C.*:—

“Your dispatch informing me of the wishes of Lieut. General Grant, to pursue Price to the Arkansas river is just received.

“I sent curiers with orders to this effect directed to the several brigade commanders of the troops of General Rosecrans, who had abandoned the pursuit by his orders. I will proceed with my own force towards Cassville, hoping to concentrate sufficient troops at that point to resume the pursuit.

“S. R. CURTIS, *Major General*.”

Before leaving Neosho, on the 30th, I also sent the following more extended report, which was dispatched by telegraph from Fort Scott, Nov. 1st. These dispatches are set out in this report to make me properly responsible for my share of the influences that led to the action of the Lieut. General and yourself:—

“HEAD-QUARTERS ARMY OF THE BORDER,  
“NEOSHO, Missouri, Oct. 30, 1864. }

“Major Gen. Halleck, Washington, D. C: —

“I desire the Lieut. General to understand that, from the commencement of the effort in this campaign, I have had to occupy a debatable position as to my authority over troops, while a necessity pressed me forward.

“The militia cavil about going across state lines, and General Rosecrans’s commanders, except one or two, ever since we formed a junction, expressed a conviction that they had done enough, and urged, with much truth, their long march and general destitution as the reason for delay. I used arguments, expostulation, and orders, till we fought at Charlot, opposite Fort Scott. Here General Pleasanton, without consulting me, flanked off most of his force and insisted that further pursuit was needless. I did not know where General Rosecrans’s head-quarters were, for he had been shifting them fifty or sixty miles in the rear, and matters required immediate action. I therefore informed General Pleasanton that I assumed the responsibilities and must exercise the prerogatives of rank, and direct him to resume the pursuit.

“To this he yielded and ordered his brigade to join me. They were in full march when General Blunt overtook the enemy at Newtonia, and General Sanborn’s brigade came up in time to secure a victory, where we had only been able to hold our own for two hours, with considerable loss on both sides.

“The pursuit was resumed, when the order of General Rosecrans came, directing his troops to their several district locations, and they immediately commenced to carry out that order.

“This left only my department volunteers who had borne the brunt of the last battle, and were sadly reduced in numbers, not exceeding one thousand effective men. My militia had left me at Fort Scott, supposing, very reasonably, that the united regular volunteers were enough to pursue Price.

I saw no alternative and, with mortification, returned from the retreating foe.

“Both Generals, Rosecrans and Pleasanton, were a hundred miles in my rear, and it seemed impossible to correct this mistake. I am sure they would not have withdrawn their troops if they had been present, both supposing I could not again overtake Price.

“I had fallen back twelve miles, to this place, when I received your dispatch informing me that ‘the Lieut. General desires that Price should be pursued to the Arkansas,’ and I immediately issued orders announcing this to all the troops, directing them to return by the shortest lines to the pursuit.

“I still occupy a debatable position and have telegraphed General Rosecrans my desire that, as a large majority of the troops are his, he should come and assume command.

“The necessity of pushing Price’s force beyond the Arkansas is so obvious I have not hesitated to disregard department lines, and act only in view of results which involve the safety of our little garrisons in front and the future peace of the inhabitants of Missouri, Kansas, and Arkansas. I was not well when I started, and have been eighteen days without changing my clothes, but I am now well and willing to do all in my power to execute the wishes of the Lieut. General, and only fear that conflicts, or doubts, in relation to orders may embarrass my movements.

“Price is now entering a mountainous country, very destitute of supplies, and his men are actually falling dead of starvation in his rear. They hang together under the impression that we kill all prisoners, a falsehood well calculated to retain his force intact. He still has three pieces of artillery, and his numbers are very great. He has destroyed most of his train and is very destitute, but all of his men being mounted, he continues to make rapid progress which can only be overcome by extraordinary efforts on the part of our troops.

“The delay occasioned by General Rosecrans’s orders will be equivalent to thirty-six hours, but it is partially compen-

sated by a little rest and food, which we were unable to procure in this vicinity.

"I must say, in conclusion, that I desire to avoid all reproachful imputations against Generals Rosecrans and Pleasanton, who have acted, no doubt, upon their best judgment as things are seen at their stand point. I must award to General Pleasanton high commendations for his skill and gallantry in the field. I do not mean to depreciate others of whom I shall speak in my proper report, and who have not only been gallant in many fields, but are constantly willing to aid me, to the utmost of human endurance, to carry out what I consider a complete result of this campaign.

"I have the honor to be your obedient servant,

"S. R. CURTIS, *Major General.*"

The foregoing correspondence shows all the facts, in my possession, concerning the withdrawal of forces from the pursuit of Price. But for the presence of our united troops the people of south-west Missouri were overpowered and Price had everything, including the approaching elections, his own way, just as he had them 1861, when he controlled the state of Missouri in this same vicinity. Besides, there were the posts of Fayetteville, Fort Gibson, and Fort Smith below, near and on the Arkansas where we had a vast amount of public stores and several thousands of our comrades who were at the mercy of Price's starving, stealing hordes.

I had, as subsequently directed by you, sent a dispatch to General Thayer, Fort Smith, from Fort Scott, dated Oct. 26th, informing him that I was "trying to continue the pursuit till his force is entirely destroyed or beyond your post," and in every point of view it seemed necessary to press the enemy beyond these posts. Your dispatch of the 28th, informing me of the wishes of the Lient. General, that the enemy should be pursued beyond the Arkansas, was singularly appreciative of all this; the only misfortune is, that it did not arrive twenty hours sooner.

An honest difference of opinion existed, as shown by a

dispatch sent by General Pleasanton to General Rosecrans, from Fort Scott on the 26th or 27th, and also, by a communication emanating from General Sanborn, which is as follows : —

“HEAD-QUARTERS DISTRICT SOUTH-WESTERN MO., }  
“SPRINGFIELD, MO., Nov. 12th, 1864. }

“*Major General Pleasanton* : —

“I have just returned from Cassville and will forward my official report of the campaign, in a few days.

“No one has fired a shot at the enemy since the battle of Newtonia, where the enemy gained great advantage over Blunt at first, but my command got in in time to turn the enemy's right, and the tide of things.

“The enemy lost very largely in men and horses in Northern Arkansas and the border. My idea was, and is now, when we get him below Newtonia and the region of grain, mills, and cattle, we should not crowd him any more, but rather make an effort to hold him in this land of starvation as we would a garrison out of supplies, until his army broke up and divided. Deserters were very numerous while Price was in this section, but I have seen more since he was pushed off towards his supplies.

“My own view is, that all the efforts of General Curtis to drive the enemy,—and they have been great, and entitle him to credit,—have been to our detriment and the enemy's advantage, for I believe one-half of his army would have deserted north of the Arkansas, had it not been for fear of the pursuing foe, and the pursuit has been expensive; but the enemy has suffered badly and all should be satisfied I suppose.

“My dispatches from General Thayer indicate that the troops on the Arkansas will not attack Price.

“JOHN B. SANBORN, *Brig. General Commanding.*”

General Sanborn commanded the district about Fort Scott and Newtonia, where Price's forces were foraging and burning, and murdering; and if not driven out would also have returned on my department with his marauding bands of

guerrillas, bush whackers, and "deserters," which I desired to have as far from my lines as Texas.

Having now promulgated your order so as to bring the forces back to the pursuit, I immediately returned to Newtonia, and on the next day, Oct. 31st, I moved towards Cassville, as far as Gadfly, where I ascertained that Price had moved, with his main force, toward Pineville, and resumed his position on what is known as the state line road. I therefore turned due south and camped near Keitsville, making short marches to allow my expected reinforcements to come up.

On the morning of Nov. 1st, Lieut. Colonel Benteen joined me at the ruins of Keitsville with his brigade, about one thousand eight hundred strong. This force was composed of portions of the 10th Missouri, 3d and 4th Iowa cavalry, and some Indiana cavalry, all veteran volunteers, many of whom had served with me in my campaign of 1862 through this same country, and shared in the glory of our struggles at Keitsville, Cross Timber, Sugar Creek, and Pea Ridge. This brigade was the best equipped, disciplined, and commanded force in the field, and I now had about three thousand men, with sufficient artillery also, so arranged by doubling teams as to move with the usual speed of cavalry forces. I moved forward and camped near Pea Ridge, Arkansas, where, as I telegraphed you, I expected McNeil would overtake me.

This force not arriving, I remained the 2d, during which period I received a reinforcement of fifty men from Cassville, forwarded by Major Melton, who commanded the post. I also ascertained that my couriers sent to Generals McNeil and Sanborn did not overtake them till they were near Springfield, and being near they had gone to get supplies, etc. Still I hoped they would overtake me, but determined to proceed and press the foe with my three thousand against their boasted thirty thousand. I sent prisoners, taken on the road, to General Rosecrans with the following note:—

“HEAD-QUARTERS ARMY OF THE BORDER, )  
“In the field, camp near Pea Ridge, Ark., Nov. 2d, 1864, )

“*Major General Rosecrans* :—

“Understanding that you have ordered most of our prisoners to St. Louis, I send you those taken since. I have waited the return of some more of your troops for the pursuit of Price, but will proceed cautiously with what I have, hoping to deter the enemy from besieging and taking the posts in Western Arkansas, and to rid the country of Price’s desperate hordes.

“I have the honor to be, General, your obedient servant,

“S. R. CURTIS, *Major General*.”

After distributing a few rations that overtook us in a terrible storm of rain and snow, I moved forward on the 3d, camping at night near Cross Hollows. During the day Colonel Benteen received an order from General Rosecrans directing him to report to General Sanborn, at Cassville, transmitted through General Sanborn at Springfield, on the 2d.

This order was subsequently explained, as having been issued on the supposition that I was still at, or near, Cassville, and on the supposition that it was so issued, I ordered Lieut. Colonel Benteen to continue with me, reporting my conduct to General Rosecrans and to yourself. My report to you is as follows :—

“CROSS HOLLOWS, Nov. 3d, 1864.

“*Major General H. A. Hallck, Washington, D. C.* :—

“General Thayer, at Fort Scott, and Colonel Harrison, at Fayetteville, send me dispatches urging me forward to save them from Price. Three days unremitting rain and snow detain me, but I hope my advance will reach Fayetteville to-night. Price’s forces were yesterday on two sides of that place, but were not attacking our troops. General Rosecrans, at Jefferson City, yesterday, and General Sanborn, at Springfield, to-day, ordered Colonel Benteen’s brigade to report at Cassville. This is a material part of my force, and I cannot

believe these officers would again embarrass my operations were they acquainted with the circumstances. I hope, therefore, my order to Colonel Benteen will receive your approval and that of General Rosecrans.

"Your dispatch informing me that General Rosecrans is ordered to pursue Price to the Arkansas, does not, as I suppose, relieve me from concurrent duty implied by your former dispatch, expressing to me the desire of the Lieut. General.

"S. R. CURTIS, *Major General.*"

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

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## EDITORIAL NOTES.

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—MR. C. CHILDS, of Dubuque, one of the most competent persons in the state for the task, proposes to write and publish a "History of Iowa Newspapers," and by his suggestions has set half the papers of Iowa to publishing their autobiographies. Mr. Childs is a pioneer newspaper man of Dubuque, and is constantly giving the readers of one or the other of the two excellent daily journals of his city valuable historical sketches, and has promised to furnish an occasional article for the ANNALS OF IOWA. His papers, "Names of Iowa Newspapers," and "Corrections of Indian History," the first of which was published in the Dubuque *Herald*, and the second in the *Times* of the same city, have been widely copied by the Iowa press, and would find a place in the ANNALS but for the pre-engagement of our pages for original contributions.

—MR. E. BOOTH, editor of the Anamosa *Eureka*, who writes better than he talks, and whom we gladly welcome as a collaborator, besides his *Reminiscences of Twenty-seven Years Ago*," printed in the present number, is under verbal bonds to us to furnish a paper for our next on the preliminary steps taken to organize the "Iowa Institution for the Deaf and Dumb." It cannot fail of interest, since, aside from the curiosity that all benevolent readers will have to know the particulars of the inception of that noble and well administered state institution, it promises to treat coincidentally of such illustrious personages as the late John C. Calhoun.

—"NOTES on the Early History of Pottawattamie County," the first part of which, published in the April ANNALS, was so well received, will be continued in the October number.



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